

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00
OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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O R 081404Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2700
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0095

DEPT ALSO PASS USIA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SOPN, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: GOL PRESS CENSORSHIP HITS THE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS

REF: BEIRUT 0032

1. SUMMARY. THE CENSORS HAVE LAID DOWN AN
INITIAL SET OF RULES WHICH HAS UPSET THE BEIRUT FOREIGN
PRESS CORPS. CBS APPEARS UNCOMPROMISINGLY OPPOSED IN
PRINCIPLE TO ANY "CENSORSHIP TAX," AND FOREIGN PRESS IS
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APPEALING FOR RELIEF AT VARIOUS ECHELONS OF THE GOL.
END SUMMARY.

2. FOREIGN PRESS CORPS UNDER PRESSURE. DIRECTOR
GENERAL OF SURETE GENERALE ANTOINE DAHDAH, WHO IS
RESPONSIBLE FOR CENSORSHIP SYSTEM UNDER "LEGISLATIVE
DECREE NUMBER ONE" OF JAN 1, HAS ANNOUNCED 13-POINT

PROGRAM OF CONTROL MEASURES TO FOREIGN PRESS ESTABLISHMENT. MEASURES INCLUDE REQUIREMENTS THAT WIRE SERVICES INSTALL TELEX RECEIVERS, AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE, IN CENSORSHIP OFFICE; THAT AN "EXPORT TAX" BE PAID BY ANY NEWS ORGANIZATION AT THE RATE OF 10 LEBANESE POUNDS PER DAY, REGARDLESS OF THE VOLUME OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE CENSORED; AND THAT TELEVISION FILMS BE PROCESSED IN LEBANON (RATHER THAN ABROAD, AS IS NOW THE USUAL PRACTICE) AND COPIES BE GIVEN TO THE CENSORS FOR FILING. (THIS LAST MEASURE WAS LATER MODIFIED, AND, AS IT NOW STANDS, REQUIRES TELEVISION NEWSMEN TO SUBMIT THEIR SCRIPTS FOR CENSORSHIP BUT NOT

THE FILMS THEMSELVES.)

3. FOREIGN PRESS REACTION: MCGRAW HILL CORRESPONDENT WILLIAM BRANIGIN, TEMPORARILY IN BEIRUT, CALLED ON EMBASSY PRESS OFFICER JAN 7. ALTHOUGH BRANIGIN WAS PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN OTHER MATTERS, HE SUGGESTED THAT CENSORSHIP WAS PERHAPS PRELUDE TO FURTHER "REPRESSIVE" MEASURES BY GOL IN OTHER FIELDS. LATER SAME DAY, CBS CORRESPONDENTS TUNNELL AND SEFTON CALLED ON PRESS OFFICER AND EXPRESSED VIEW THAT RECENT MEASURES ARE DESIGNED TO DRIVE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS OUT OF BEIRUT ALTOGETHER. TUNNELL DESCRIBED DAHDAH AS AFFABLE BUT VERY TOUGH. SEFTON SAID CBS, AS MATTER OF PRINCIPLE, WOULD NOT PAY ANY "CENSORSHIP TAX," EVEN IF DAHDAH CALLED IT AN "EXPORT TAX." TUNNELL AND SEFTON INQUIRED AS TO THE EMBASSY AND USG ATTITUDE. PRESS CONFIDENTIAL

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OFFICER SAID THAT, WHEREAS USG AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE OF COURSE FAVORED A FREE PRESS, DEGREE OF PRESS FREEDOM IN LEBANON WAS PRIMARILY A RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, NOT THE USG. LOCAL BBC CORRESPONDENT IS ALSO CONCERNED OVER RECENT GOL ACTIONS RESTRICTING FOREIGN PRESS AND HAS SOUGHT ADVICE OF UK AMBASSADOR.

4. FOREIGN PRESS APPEALS TO GOL. CBS REPORTERS SAID THAT THEY AND OTHER FOREIGN REPORTERS HAD ALREADY BEEN IN TOUCH WITH COL DAHDAH'S SUPERIOR, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR SALMAN, AND PRIME MINISTER (AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION) AL-HOSS. SALMAN, THEY SAID, APPEARED GENUINELY SURPRISED TO HEAR ABOUT THE "EXPORT TAX," AND PROMISED TO LOOK INTO THE MEASURES GENERALLY, BUT WAS NON-COMMITTAL. VARIOUS JOURNALISTS HAVE ALSO TALKED TO AL-HOSS, IN THE PRESENCE OF DAHDAH, AND AT LEAST TUNNELL AND SEFTON HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT DAHDAH WAS VERY MUCH IN CHARGE.

5. AT THE MOMENT, THE FOREIGN PRESS IS COUNTING ON GHASSAN TUEINI, WHO JUST RETURNED TO BEIRUT. THEY HAVE ASKED HIM TO INTERVENE ON THEIR BEHALF WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THEY SAY HE HAS PROMISED TO DO SO WHEN HE MEETS THE PRESIDENT JAN 8. HOWEVER, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM AMONG THE PRESS CORPS THAT EVEN SARKIS IS IN A POSITION, OR WILLING, TO ACT ON THEIR BEHALF. TUNNELL AND SEFTON SAID THAT CBS NEW YORK WAS TAKING AN ACTIVE INTEREST AND ASKED IF IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO APPEAL TO THE LEBANESE AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON. PRESS OFFICER SAID THIS WOULD CERTAINLY NOT BE INAPPROPRIATE, SINCE THE AMBASSADOR IS THE OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF PRESIDENT SARKIS AND PROVIDED THAT INTERMEDIATE DEMANDS OF APPEAL -- THROUGH THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR, THE PRIME MINISTER AND TUEINI, PROVED INEFFECTIVE.
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Message Attributes

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